



## MAPS Tools Institutional Use Case

Private, 4-Year Historically Black College Seeks to Validate  
Inclusion Initiatives and Expand Enrollment

## Introduction

Nationally, higher education institutions experienced a decline in enrollment between 2010 and 2020, and experts in the field predict that a looming enrollment cliff—a rapid demographic decline—will soon affect the ecosystem of higher education. In order to adapt to this changing landscape, college and university leadership need innovative, effective, and equity-centered data tools to help answer pressing questions about the viability of their institutions.

The MAPS Project is a student-centric initiative to chart the rapidly evolving higher education system and works to bring high-quality data and historically marginalized voices to higher education decision-makers. In the summer of 2022, the MAPS Project team at the Sorenson Impact Center (SIC) engaged a higher education institution (HEI), an anonymous Historically Black private college in the South—referred to as “**The College**” in this case study—in a partnership focused on determining additional ways the College may provide targeted support to underserved students in its community. The goals of the partnership included:

1. Demonstrating how population and enrollment trends may impact the College’s ability to recruit and retain from particular markets.
2. Providing additional insight into the College’s financial situation that may impact its approach to instituting targeted equity initiatives.
3. Comparing what makes the College attractive to students equity-wise compared to its peers.

In order to better organize resources to support the College’s commitment to equity over the next decade, the MAPS data team employed the full suite of [MAPS data tools](#)—the [Financial Health Indicator Index \(FHII\)](#), [Institutional Equity Outcomes \(IEO\)](#), and Student Trends and Enrollment Projections (STEP) tools—to better understand the College’s financial health, equity performance, and trends in demographics and enrollment. Using the tools, College leaders compared their institution’s performance against peers and aspirational schools. This functionality allowed them to gain a valuable perspective of where they stood amidst their competition and identify potential areas for improvement. At the conclusion of the partnership, the College was able to validate their ongoing strategy to engage marginalized groups of learners using data compiled by the MAPS toolset.

While the goals of the College were specific to their unique needs, the use case illustrates one instance of where MAPS data tools helped identify areas of opportunity, offer additional data points to support the work an HEI is already doing, and frame strategic questions to help leaders anticipate trends and continue driving systemic change. Ideally, other institutions in the future can utilize the toolset to better plan their strategies.

## Background

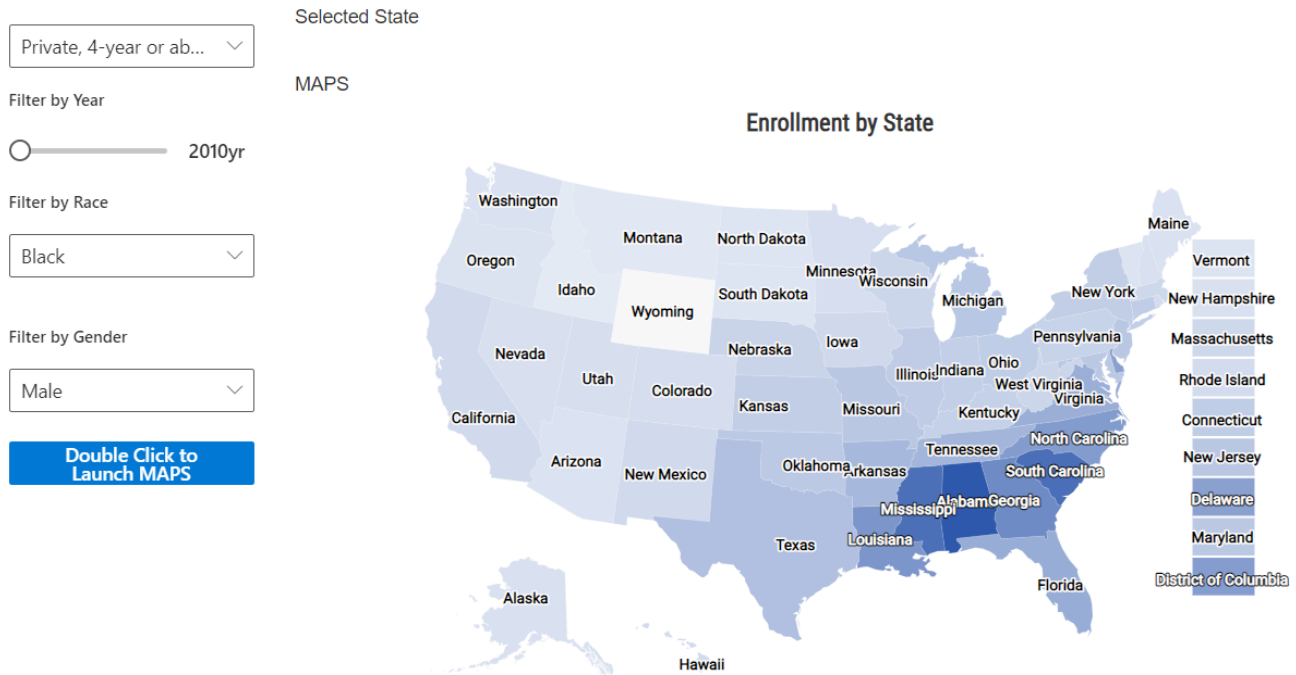
The College leadership provided the MAPS team with information on their top five recruitment states and six schools the College considers either at peer-level or aspirational across various metrics (prestige, graduation rate, etc.). This use case primarily focuses on findings from two states of particular relevance to the College—South Carolina and Georgia—to exemplify how a state-to-state comparison might be approached. In addition to a state-level look, some institution-level analysis was conducted to provide deeper context on the College’s competitive standing. The populations that were prioritized for this study include Black men, Black women, men of two or more races, and women of two or more races. These groups make up almost the entire student population at the College, and the College is dedicated to serving these students as they may require unique support to navigate systemic inequities. Individuals with these racial identities also make up a disproportionate amount of the incarcerated population of their state—one of several target populations which College leadership aims to empower through the power of education.

While higher education leaders continue to grapple with declining enrollment and equity gaps, the College is taking action to engage specific underserved populations - a move that could both increase enrollment and further its mission of equity. A proposed intervention would support innovative and transformative educational opportunities for vulnerable student groups that will positively impact participants’ lives. Information cited throughout this report adds further validation for why an initiative like this is relevant and guides leaders to position this program competitively within the context of the College and the broader market in which it operates.

## Data Analysis

Demographic and Enrollment Insights: The MAPS team used the Student Trends and Enrollment Projections (STEP) dashboard to analyze the College’s top five recruitment states: South Carolina, Georgia, New York, Maryland, and California. This dashboard uses US Census data and data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to visualize historical trends and make future predictions about demographic and enrollment changes for each state. It is important to differentiate between *population* data and *enrollment* data, as the relationship between the two is not always a one-to-one ratio.

For example, the population of Black men may be increasing in some states, but the enrollment data may show that Black men are less inclined to pursue postsecondary education in their home state. In this example, a school would need to be aware that although the in-state population is increasing, the enrollment pool is actually decreasing.



Source: MAPS Student Trends and Enrollment Projections Dashboard. This example dashboard snapshot displays state-level enrollment of Black male undergraduate students in private 4-year or above institutions in 2010.

The data revealed several key insights relevant to the College’s future enrollment strategy. Georgia is the only state with projected growth in the population (demographic change) of Black women or women of two or more races. While Maryland enrollment trends are increasing, population growth is projected to decrease. California appears to have moderate population growth or even a decline for women, but it shows quite high enrollment projections for both sexes. Both population and enrollment trends are less favorable in South Carolina than they are in the other four recruitment states. This means that the College will need to pursue a currently untapped market in South Carolina, look primarily outside of the state for new enrollment, or employ a combination of the two strategies.

State	Projected Demographic Change*		Projected Enrollment Trend*	
South Carolina	M: 2%	W: -0.88%	M: 0.54%	W: -7.42%
Georgia	M: 12.39%	W: 9.62%	M: -14.86%	W: 30.33%
New York	M: -16.35%	W: -17.39%	M: 7.36%	W: -25.42%
Maryland	M: -3.14%	W: -5.1%	M: 109.3%	W: 60.44%
California	M: 2.58%	W: -3.81%	M: 92.41%	W: 75.95%

Data is for men and women identifying as Black or two or more races for each individual state. Data is projected through 2030. Note that colors do not correspond with positive or negative growth, but with gender.

**Financial Health Insights:** The MAPS Financial Health Indicators Index dashboard uses IPEDS data from 2014-2019. Indicators of financial performance are separated into five different categories: assets, debt, expenses, revenue, and student factors. Institutional data from IPEDS is run through a weighted formula to determine overall financial health in relation to institutions in the same sector, with the 100th percentile being the highest available ranking. Each indicator is assigned a subscore between -2 and 2. Then each school is provided an overall percentile score calculated from the weighted subscores and applied within the applicable institutional sector (public 4-year sector, private 2-year sector, etc.).

The MAPS team used its Financial Health Indicators Index to assess and map the financial health of the College, its top three peer institutions, and top three aspirational institutions as determined by College leadership.

To demonstrate the process, the MAPS team compared the College and two other schools in the same state, one considered a peer institution and the other an aspirational institution. In this analysis, the College received a 22nd percentile score, the peer school received a 39th percentile score, and the aspirational school received an 88th percentile score. Due to its high percentile ranking compared to other private schools in its sector, the aspirational school is perhaps best positioned to make financial investments in equitable solutions to attract enrollment.

## College



## Peer



## Aspirational



Source: MAPS Financial Health Dashboard. Display of three weighted financial health percentile rankings for the College and two competitor schools.

**The intra-state financial health score comparison, as well as further comparisons done between the College and all of its aspirational and peer institutions, indicated areas for investment to improve its financial health and student outcomes.**

Equity Performance Insights: Using the Equity Index, several key insights emerged surrounding the College, its peers, and aspirational institutions between 2015-2019.

- Peer Institutions: While two of the peer schools were slightly ahead of the College from a financial health perspective, the data did not indicate a significant financial competitive advantage. One mirrored the College on equity metrics, except for Black Pell enrollment count, where the College's Pell enrollment excels. However, this number has steadily declined from 2015-2019. With this in mind, if these peer institutions chose to focus future recruitment campaigns in viable states, they will not have a significant competitive advantage without major financial and equity-related adjustments.
- Aspirational Institutions: Using the Equity tool, SIC data analysts were able to assess that one aspirational institution located in the same state as the College, ranked quite high in its financial health while seeing a steady increase in equity metrics. This school appeared to have a competitive advantage for attracting future students.

The data suggests that clear areas of opportunity exist for the College, particularly due to its strength in prioritizing equitable student success.

## Additional Research

With the data analysis stage of the partnership complete, the MAPS team and College leadership were able to discuss strategies for advancing their commitment to equity. When the College initially approached SIC, leadership already developed a program to support

marginalized learners from a range of backgrounds, including formerly incarcerated students and adult learners. In order to provide more holistic support beyond raw data, the MAPS team conducted a sweeping literature review assessing the needs and existing policies surrounding the target groups that the College hoped to engage.

When combined with the landscape scan, the data suggests that there is a need for a programmatic and innovative strategic investment of resources in order for the College to not only support additional students with a genuine interest in pursuing higher education, but also to increase enrollment and graduation rates. The landscape research validates that there is demand from their target populations. Additionally, it suggests that supporting these populations represents an opportunity for the College to grow strategically. To accomplish this growth, College leadership can leverage the data derived from the MAPS tools to better incorporate an understanding of their financial opportunities and constraints. Furthermore, information gained from this collaboration helps solidify the key qualities around equity that make the institution attractive compared to its peers.

## **Conclusion: Employing the MAPS Tool Suite**

With the integration of FHII, IEO, and STEP tool data, the College now benefits from concrete figures that can be shared with hesitant stakeholders to convince them of the ongoing need to engage a disadvantaged segment of the population, both because it fulfills their mission statement and sustains their enrollment. This use case provides one example of how leaders in higher education can leverage the MAPS tools to further their equity goals, displaying how the three can be utilized in tandem to fit the specific needs of an HEI in a rapidly changing education landscape.